

If he shall offer it for a Thanksgiving-offering. (7:12)

Life is wonderful. This is especially true when one considers the alternative. In any event, the fact that the Torah has us bringing a *Korban Todah*, Thanksgiving-offering, upon being saved from serious illness, released from prison, or having survived a dangerous journey indicates that staying alive is a good thing. It is definitely something which we should make the most of. It is, therefore, perplexing that *Bais Shammai* and *Bais Hillel* debated one another for two and one-half years concerning the very same issue: Would it have been better not to have been created, or is creation beneficial? Clearly, there are reasons pro and con. The conclusion is more or less an impasse: We would have been better off had we not been created, but now that the option has been taken from us and we are here, we should be introspective and refine our actions. In other words: Make the most of it.

In his wonderful volume of insights from **Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl**, “Forever His Students,” Rabbi Baruch Leff ponders the obvious question. What do *Chazal* mean when they question the benefit of man’s creation? Are they questioning Hashem? As the ultimate Source of all good, He created us. Is there any other conclusion for our existence other than Hashem’s act of altruism? Are we to think for one moment that Hashem created us to be miserable, to fail in life? What else could *Ben Shammai* and *Bais Hillel* be debating? There must be some deeper interpretation of this *Chazal*, because, after all is said and done, it seems that the dispute revolves around Hashem.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the debate between *Bais Hillel* and *Bais Shammai* in no way concerns Hashem’s decision to create mankind. That decision was a pure act of altruism with a goal to provide an opportunity for mankind to benefit and receive reward. The debate focuses on us. From our perspective, should we have second thoughts? Should we feel that we would have been better off not being created, not letting Hashem down (so to speak)?

The foibles of mankind are many and complex. Every person is destined to sin. We are not perfect – even though some of us have personal visions of grandeur. Thus, *Bais Hillel* and *Bais Shammai* wonder about all of the benefits of being created our way – from our vantage point, the disadvantages. Imagine, the “disappointment” and “pain” that our Heavenly Father “experiences” when we – the fruits of His labor – sin egregiously. So, is it really worth it?

Rav Weinberg explains that as Hashem’s “children,” our relationship with Him is unique. If an infant were to be acutely aware of the enormous pain his mother experiences during childbirth, he would probably declare that the benefits of being born do not outweigh his mother’s pain. Why should she suffer so much for him? Even if the mother would argue and claim that she was willing to endure the pain if it meant having a child, the child, on the other hand, should contend that he would never want to be the cause of his mother’s suffering. While he understands his mother’s yearning for a child, he is concerned with the hurt and pain – not the ensuing benefits.

This is how we should feel vis-à-vis our relationship with the Almighty. True, Hashem’s creation of

the world was an incredible act of kindness, and we certainly appreciate everything that He has done. It is the “us” about which we are concerned. We are unsure whether we should feel awkward, even remorseful and filled with regret, concerning the “pain” through which we are putting Hashem. *Chazal* conclude that, indeed, there is merit to the way we feel. From the human perspective, we should have eschewed existence, since it involves sin and disappointment. We know that we are not going to make Hashem happy – all of the time. So, why would we want to be created? The choice, however, was never given to us. In His infinite wisdom, Hashem decided that it was “worth it.” With this in mind, we are able to develop an altogether different – and perhaps frightening – perspective on the concept of sin.

When we act inappropriately by breaching the code of discipline as prescribed in the Torah, we are sinning against Hashem, Who is our Creator and also our loving Father in Heaven. While Hashem is certainly above the human concept of emotion, we nonetheless, on some level, have “hurt” Him with our actions. Children should want to please their parents – not hurt them. When we sin, we cause our Parent in Heaven “distress.” It is not something that courses through our minds when we transgress, but maybe it should. It will certainly change our attitude.